

**Sunday 28 June 2026**  
**The Fourth Sunday after Trinity**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Jeremiah 28:5-9**  
**NT: Romans 6:12-23**  
**Gp: Matthew 10:40-42**

I wonder why it was that those words ‘a cup of cold water’ jumped out at me last week? The great poet and theologian Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that we know Scripture is inspired because it has a unique power to ‘find’ us – to resonate with who we are. And this last week most of us will have been given a taste of what it must have been like to be thirsty in the midday sun of the Mediterranean summer, when Jesus was teaching his followers – thirst that becomes all consuming. Jesus spoke about how his disciples represented him, they represented the truth about God, and they would provoke a response, they would need other people’s help, just as he did, and in throwing himself on the kindness of strangers, he built a community of friends. This attitude of openness, of assuming that people are basically good, is one that we need to hold on to. It’s certainly not a naïve belief that people are all kind all the time – Jesus begins by calling people to repent of their sins, but even that call to turn our lives around is grounded in the hope and promise that messy human lives are not beyond redemption.

The image of a cup of cold water given freely is a powerful one, and one that challenges me to think about how our city works, and how, as a church, we can shift the culture towards the Kingdom of God, and the heart of God, the one who sent us.

Let me take you on a trip into the history of Liverpool. Back in the early years of the reign of Queen Victoria this city of ours was the tenth biggest in the world, by population, half a million people packed into a small area not much larger than what we think of today as the city centre. Liverpool was growing as fast then as some cities in Africa are today – people were moving in huge numbers from the countryside, from Ireland, from across the world, seeking their fortunes in the port, as sailors, or tradesmen, or servants, or working in the oldest profession of all. While St George’s Hall was being built, as a symbol of the city’s pride and wealth, thousands were cramped into anywhere they could lay down their heads. The city was particularly notorious for its cellar dwellings, where a whole family lived in one room, and living underground in a city with a very patchy sewer system, didn’t lend itself to good public health. Life expectancy was short, because disease was rife, and medical understanding of illnesses like cholera was still far from perfect. A cup of cold water could kill you, in those days, as it still can for many people around the world today, with poor sanitation.

Before electricity, or telephones, or gas, or the internet, good sewers, and clean drinking water, made modern life possible, so that thousands of people could live in a city like Liverpool, and not kill each other, by drinking poisoned water.

If you grew up in a family like mine, you will have been taken to Lake Vrynwy in North Wales, the vast man-made reservoir, built by the people of Liverpool, and the source of our excellent, soft, drinking water to this day. It’s right that we give thanks to God for these blessings, and don’t take them for granted.

You’ll probably be aware that the ownership, and quality of Britain’s water companies, is a political issue again in our own time. I’m not going to preach about the merits or not of public ownership, but to bring us back to Jesus’ message, and use of the image of being given a cup of cold water – he uses it as a powerful sign of a blessing, something given for free, something that gives life, something that you can wash with, something that gives people dignity.

Back to Queen Victoria’s Liverpool, with its huge numbers of people around the Pierhead – dockers, sailors, passengers, some of them emigrating with their families to new lives in the new world. There in the middle of the hubbub was a man who ran a refreshments stall – a kiosk that did a very good trade, selling food and drink, sweets, pies, last minute supplies for journeys that might be to the Wirral, or might be to California. He was called William Shaw Simpson. He was born in 1829, in poverty, and he made a reputation by his

generosity and trustworthiness. In front of his refreshment stall he used to have a bowl for donations, and because his pitch was perfectly positioned, he raised thousands of pounds, equivalent to millions today, for people around the world in need – for victims of famine, in Ireland, or India; for striking coal miners in South Wales, who hewed the coal that powered Liverpool’s steam ships – his bowl became so famous that he became known by it – ‘Simpson Bowl’. When he died in 1883 sentimental Scousers were moved to set up a memorial in his memory, near where his refreshment stand had been. The location that was chosen was the corner of Chapel Street and George’s Dock Gates, just below the tower of Liverpool Parish Church, a memorial set into the wall of the churchyard, at the level of the dock road, the thoroughfare he had served. And his memorial? A fountain. A public fountain, from which anyone could drink, free of charge, from thirsty dockers, to homeless tramps, to passengers on their way to an ocean liner.

It’s a beautiful monument, although it’s now sadly looking the worse for wear, and for many years the fountain has been dry. And there are old fountains all over the city in the same state. The thing is, maybe 50 years ago it made sense to say that the days when people needed a public fountain were over – everyone had access to safe tap water at home. But now, as we know, the city in some ways is like it was in Victorian times again – there are people living on the streets; there are people visiting, who in our increasingly hot summers, can find themselves dangerously thirsty; there are people who go to gyms, who insist on carrying plastic bottles of water around with them, to keep themselves hydrated; there are people who’ve had a good night in the pubs and clubs, who would really benefit from a free cup of cold water. So, I’d like us to explore recommissioning Simpson’s Fountain, and working with others across the parish to do likewise, partly to remember an extraordinary, ordinary, Liverpudlian, but also because Jesus Christ calls us to be visible, to be present, to make a difference, in the public domain, on the streets, not just behind closed doors.

This verse from Matthew’s gospel packs a punch – the Kingdom of God is like a cup of cold water, given freely, on a hot summer’s day. Drink deeply today, and let’s be prepared to share what we have received.

**Fr Philip Anderson**